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President: Mr. Deiss ..... (Switzerland)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held the debate on this agenda item at its 61st plenary meeting, on 9 December 2010, and adopted resolution 65/239, entitled "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade", at its 73rd plenary meeting, on 23 December 2010.

Today, we remember the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. In its resolution adopted in November 2006 on the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, the General Assembly rightly states that "the slave trade and slavery are among the worst violations of human rights in the history of humanity" (*resolution 61/19, fourth preambular paragraph*).

Throughout history, slavery can be found in almost all cultures and continents. Evidence of slavery even predates written records. The transatlantic slave trade was uniquely horrendous due to its scale and its duration. This day of remembrance offers us an opportunity to acknowledge this dark chapter in the history of humanity and to pay tribute to the millions of victims who lost their lives and to all those courageous men and women who fought for the abolition of slavery.

Today's commemoration is an occasion for us to renew our commitment to education programmes. Public awareness of the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the 400-year-long slave trade is key to a better understanding of history and to educating future generations about the dangers of racism and prejudice and the universality of human rights.

Furthermore, it is an opportunity to highlight the fact that, regretfully, two centuries after the official abolition of slavery, contemporary forms of slavery-like practices persist and millions of human beings around the world are still treated as commodities in various ways. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms".

Despite that commitment by Member States over 60 years ago, there are more than 10 million people around the world trapped in forced labour today. Forced labour takes different forms, including debt bondage, trafficking and other forms of modern slavery. The victims are the most vulnerable — women and girls forced into prostitution, migrants trapped in debt bondage, and sweatshop or farm workers kept there by illegal tactics and paid little or nothing.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Debt bondage, while the least known form of contemporary slavery, is nevertheless the most widely used method of enslaving people. Despite the fact that it is illegal in most countries where it is found, the laws are rarely enforced and those who profit from it are seldom brought to justice. Over 100 million children around the world are exposed to the worst forms of child labour, such as work in hazardous environments, slavery or other forms of forced labour, illicit activities, including drug trafficking and prostitution, and involvement in armed conflict.

Those numbers are shocking. Today, we must renew our joint commitment and live up to the aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I repeat that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. There can be no economic, cultural or historical excuse for slavery continuing in any form in the twenty-first century.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: The transatlantic slave trade caused untold suffering. We are here today to focus on the untold stories — the living legacy of 30 million untold stories; the stories of the Africans and their descendants who were treated as less than human; the memories brought with them through the terror of the middle passage; their culture and totems suppressed and given little or no room for expression; their beliefs, to which they turned for solace and sustenance during a harrowing ordeal; and their history and their very identity, systematically erased.

Through this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we commit to remember, recognize and restore. Over the past week, the United Nations has organized a series of events to mark the occasion. I thank those who have helped to make those efforts possible, including the Caribbean Community, the African Group, the Chair of the African Union and the Permanent Missions of Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon.

Just steps from this rostrum, in the Visitors' Lobby, there is a moving exhibition. In one of the display cases can be seen a slave ball, typical of the ones used to limit the movement of slaves. It weighs 50 pounds — not 10, 20 or even 30 pounds, which are all heavy enough. Try picking up 50 pounds, even once. Then imagine it as a constant presence. Then imagine the horrendous conditions and treatment that accompanied that weight. Then imagine the mindset of the slavers who built the system — callous, righteous and infected with greed and inhuman behaviour. Yet those overlords and slave masters were all too human. Therein lies our challenge, even today, to remember slavery then and to continue the fight against its contemporary versions now.

Together, we must carry that weight. While **legalized slavery has long been abolished, slavery-like practices are very much with us — from debt bondage** and domestic servitude to forced **or early marriages, the sale of wives and trafficking in children. That** is why we have to educate people about the trade, including through the United Nations Educational Outreach Programme and UNESCO efforts, such as the Slave Route Project and the General History of Africa.

By studying slavery, we give names and faces to people and places that had been made invisible. By examining the prevailing assumptions and beliefs that allowed the practice to flourish we raise awareness of the continued dangers of racism and hatred. And by honouring slavery's victims we restore some measure of dignity to those who had so mercilessly been stripped of it. That is the aim of this International Day and of this year's observance of the International Year for People of African Descent. It is at the heart of efforts to establish a permanent memorial here at the United Nations Headquarters complex.

This International Day forces us to confront human beings at their worst. However, in those who opposed slavery then and now, we also celebrate people at their best: the brave slaves who rose up despite mortal risk; the abolitionists who challenged the status quo; and the activists who fight intolerance and injustice today. Whether renowned or unsung, those heroes show that the pursuit of human dignity is the most powerful force of all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, I would like to inform Member States of the format of today's commemorative meeting. Members will recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 17 September 2010, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the format for commemorative meetings would include statements by the President of

the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the Chairs of the five regional groups and the representative of the host country.

If there is no objection, and without setting a precedent, I shall take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to include in today's meeting statements by the Chair of the Caribbean Community and by Ms. Ruth Simmons, President of Brown University, as well as some cultural presentations.

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Salomon Nguema Owono, Deputy Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, who will speak on behalf of the African States.

Mr. Nguema Owono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Group of African States.

Today, we commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As we think of that dark chapter in the history of humankind, we cannot help but recall the horrific and dehumanizing nature of slavery and the slave trade, whereby African slaves were forcibly detained and transported as human cargo to the Americas.

This day holds great significance for the people of Africa, because our continent was ravaged by slavery and the slave trade. To this day, more than 500 years later, our continent still has not recovered from the devastation wrought by the slave trade. This International Day of Remembrance has become the most fitting annual event for us to pay homage to the African slaves who found themselves on the front lines of the fight to abolish slavery. All too often, history books have not recognized the leading role that enslaved Africans played in making the supreme sacrifice of fighting for freedom from slavery. Without their commitment to fighting for their freedom, slavery in the Americas would have persisted century after century. This is a tribute in memory of our heroes.

This commemoration is being held 10 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration. Unfortunately, the international community has achieved few of the objectives established in the Declaration. We hope for a greater commitment to the principles of Durban. The theme of this year's commemoration, "The transatlantic slave trade: the living legacy of 30 million untold stories", tells the story of each African brought to the Americas. All of them had a life, a family and a community. Who they were and where they come from were ultimately lost once they made the transatlantic crossing.

I wish to congratulate the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a significant part of the African diaspora, for their dedication and unswerving commitments to ensuring the establishment of this day of honour at the United Nations. The member States of the African Union are grateful for the ongoing partnership of CARICOM and the Member States and Secretary-General of the United Nations, in particular the Department of Public Information, for their support for this annual day of recognition and tribute to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

In the same vein, we wish to highlight the key importance of the Caribbean Community's initiative to erect a permanent memorial in a prominent place at United Nations Headquarters in recognition of the tragedy and the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. This undertaking to erect a memorial should be viewed as representing partial compliance with paragraph 101 of the Durban Declaration (A/CONF.189/12, chap. I), which, among other things, urged the international community to honour the memory of the victims of slavery. In effect, the memorial will be a tribute to the millions of African slaves who were forcibly taken from their families and countries of origin and brought to the Americas. It will become a reminder of the struggle against and triumph over slavery and more than four centuries of dehumanization of the African people. We urge States to continue to make contributions to the trust fund for the permanent memorial, which is administered by the United Nations Office for Partnerships.

We, the peoples of Africa, will never forget the slave ships and the systematic exploitation that they represented. We shall galvanize our continuing efforts to embrace all members of the broad African diaspora. In commemorating the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic S'ave Trade, we wish to pay special tribute to the people of Haiti, who were the first to topple the plantation system, which depended on African slave labour, and who established the first black republic, with an advanced Constitution that guaranteed all Africans their freedom. Haiti is an

example of strength and pride. Our Haitian brothers and sisters have suffered one disaster after another, but we believe that they will triumph with ease, as they have always done, in the face of the great adversity they have faced throughout their history.

Many benefited from the slave trade and slavery. Their gain was our loss. We invite those who benefited to search their conscience and make the necessary effort to help the peoples affected to recover the development lost to them. **May God bless the heroic and long-suffering people of Africa.**

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Latvia, who will speak on behalf of the Eastern European States.

Mr. Penke (Latvia): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States to pay our respects to the memory of those who were exploited and who died during those dark years of the barbaric and inhuman practice of slavery and the slave trade.

It is shameful that those practices are part of history and lasted for such a long time. Today's commemorative event gives us an opportunity to pay special tribute to those who risked and lost their lives in resistance to enslavement and in the campaign to abolish slavery.

On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I would like to thank the Caribbean Community, in particular Jamaica, for their leadership in presenting resolution 65/239, entitled "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade", during the current session of the General Assembly. Erecting a permanent memorial in acknowledgement of the tragedy and in consideration of the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade will be an important contribution to the memory of the victims.

The purpose of our gathering here today is not only to acknowledge and remember, but also to make sure that we avoid similar tragedies in the future. Modern-day slavery might be less visible, but it exists and is contrary to the values of freedom and dignity for which the United Nations stands. We must put an end to that abominable crime through a concerted, comprehensive and collective effort, using international mechanisms such as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing that Convention, and the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, recently adopted by the General Assembly.

We must find innovative ways to bridge the knowledge gap that still exists with regard to the consequences of the slave trade and slavery, and to continue educational outreach to fight discrimination, intolerance and prejudices.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I invite participants to hear a performance by Ms. Tricia Keens-Douglas of Grenada.

The members of the General Assembly heard a musical performance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bahamas, who will speak on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States.

Ms. Booker (Bahamas): I have the distinct honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Member States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group on this fifth annual observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, under the theme "The transatlantic slave trade: the living legacy of 30 million untold stories".

With the Assembly's historic adoption of resolution 61/19, on 28 November 2006, we as a community of nations began the process of erecting a bridge that spans 400 years from the ports of Europe to the slave ports along the west coast of Africa and to those throughout the Americas, in particular Latin America and the Caribbean. We embarked on a remarkable journey, which has brought us here today in the hope that our fervent acknowledgement of slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity will reinvigorate our sensibilities and our passion, and to recommit ourselves to ensuring that no man, woman or child is subjected ever again to such horrific crimes, in accordance with article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as was underscored earlier by President Deiss.

We can all agree that, apart from race, one of the driving forces behind the horrific practice of slavery was capitalism and the demand for commodities. What a high price to pay for millions of enslaved African

men, women and children. In the words of the late nineteenth-century economist Henry Charles Carey:

> "The first of all commodities to be exchanged is labour, and the freedom of man consists only in the exercise of the right to determine for himself in what manner his labour shall be employed, and how he will dispose of its products."

Suffice it to say that the millions of slaves on whose backs the major economies of the world were enriched could not exercise the right to determine in what manner their labour would be employed.

No, we must not forget the cries and freedom songs of our brothers and sisters, which still echo in our minds and hearts today. We must, however, do more to correct the lingering social, political, cultural and economic injustices that still plague societies in Africa, the Americas and throughout the world some two hundred years after the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. To overcome these injustices, we must recommit ourselves to eliminating systemic imbalances in the current international economic environment through, inter alia, strengthened partnerships for development, enhanced international cooperation, including the fulfilment of internationally agreed official development assistance and increased capacity-building, and to creating a fair, just and equitable international economic order so that our societies, which have suffered for too long, can achieve sustainable growth and development.

The ongoing scourge of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is a form of injustice that we have yet to overcome in spite of our efforts. The goals we set at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance still elude us. The States members of the Latin American and Caribbean Group reiterate support for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and for the convening of a one-day high-level plenary meeting during the sixty-sixth session of the Assembly, in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action. A few days ago, on 21 March, we observed the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Yet we must be ever mindful of our collective responsibility to continue the fight to eliminate all forms of racism and to the promotion and protection of all human rights for all.

We also welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 64/169, proclaiming 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent, and we thank the delegation of Colombia for spearheading this important initiative. We cannot underscore sufficiently the need to ensure respect for diversity in heritage and culture, particularly for persons of African descent who continue to suffer indignity and all forms and manifestations of racism. We encourage Member States to undertake activities in support of the International Year for People of African Descent.

As a region that was the hub for millions of enslaved African men, women and children arriving on its shores, we in Latin America and the Caribbean share a rich, unique history and culture, of which we are proud. We applaud the States members of the Caribbean Community and the African Group for spearheading annually this special celebration. We also extend thanks to the Secretariat, in particular the Department of Public Information, for the support given to this commemorative meeting and to the activities held this past week.

In conclusion, as the current Chair of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, I take this opportunity to make special note of the historic project to erect, at a place of prominence here at the United Nations, a permanent memorial in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. This project is yet another step in the process of building a bridge and in acknowledging the tragedy and lingering consequences of the slave trade. With the recent launch on 1 February of the permanent memorial website, the Latin American and Caribbean Group commends the Permanent Memorial Committee and the United Nations Office for Partnerships for their ongoing efforts to honour the legacy of 30 million untold stories. Let us not continue to pay lip service when it comes to this abhorrent practice. Let us lend our support by contributing to this historic and important initiative. Let the story be told.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Pálsson (Iceland): The transatlantic slave trade is a dark chapter in Western history. Although slavery existed in ancient times, the scale of this abhorrent practice was unprecedented. For 400 years,

millions of people were subjected to abuse and deprived of their freedom and dignity. Many did not survive the difficult journey across the ocean.

As we recall the injustice committed and the suffering of the victims, we can take encouragement from the fact that through a tough and strenuous battle, the transatlantic slave trade was eventually brought to an end. The invincible spirit of the victims themselves and others who decided that freedom for all was worth fighting for underlines the importance of our work in the United Nations. It gives hope that progress can be made and justice vindicated.

The United Nations, its agencies and, not least, its individual Member States, along with civil society, can work together in righting the many wrongs that still afflict our planet.

More than 60 years ago, we undertook, in the Assembly, to uphold human rights, as all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights further states that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms." Nevertheless, millions of people worldwide continue to be treated as property, trafficked for exploitative purposes, including forced labour and sexual exploitation, slavery and practices similar to slavery.

Women and children are subject to forced sexual labour, violence and abuse, and many of them lose their lives to HIV/AIDS. Trafficking in forced labour takes place in many industries, including the textile industry, mining and agriculture. All of our countries are affected. Some have become major destinations for victims, while others lose many of their citizens to this hideous but lucrative practice. To redress the situation, increased international cooperation and enhanced implementation of existing laws and regulations is needed, along with a change in social norms and attitudes.

In that context, let me take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, both powerful tools in the combat against trafficking.

It is our responsibility to prevent history from repeating itself. Let us commemorate the memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade by vowing to strengthen our efforts to combat modern-day slavery in all its forms.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the host country.

Mrs. DiCarlo (United States of America): Today we recognize the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade by paying tribute to the millions who suffered under the lash and praising the countless efforts of others who fought to bring this odious practice to an end.

Our tribute is not confined to a single day or a set of speeches, however solemn, but continues daily in our efforts to chronicle and preserve the history of those who suffered, to celebrate the victories of those who fought not only the practice but its legacy and, by our active efforts, to bring an end to the modern equivalent of slavery in its despicable industry, human trafficking.

The United States remains committed to preserving the memory of slavery within our own country's history. We must never forget the full extent of the human suffering involved, and must remain vigilant in our readiness to fight any attempt to deprive others of their freedom for the benefit of a few.

In the United States, we celebrate National African American History Month every February. This year we focused on the brave African Americans who fought for their freedom in the Civil War. We continue to look for ways to connect American voices to the global conversation about the transatlantic slave trade.

We are also one of the primary funders of UNESCO's Transatlantic Slave Trade Education Project, launched by a network of schools in Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, North America and Africa, which seeks to increase awareness of the causes and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade.

The transatlantic slave trade is part of our country's history. The struggle for freedom is central to the African American experience in the United States. From resolute Revolutionary War soldiers fighting for liberty to the hard-working students of today reaching for horizons that their ancestors could only have imagined, African Americans have strengthened our

nation by leading reforms, overcoming obstacles and breaking down barriers. The United States has been enriched by African American leaders who, by word and example, have sought to cast off the burden of slavery and to keep our country true to its founding principles.

On 31 January, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton acknowledged the International Year for People of African Descent, an initiative that we supported both at the United Nations and at the Organization of American States as an opportunity for all of us around the globe to celebrate the diversity of our societies and to honour the contributions that our fellow citizens of African descent make every day to the economic, social and political fabrics of our communities.

As part of that effort, we are engaging with civil society and host Governments in the Western Hemisphere on a set of programmes aimed at highlighting the contributions made by people of African descent. We are working closely with the Governments of Brazil and Colombia on action plans to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination and to promote equality in our respective countries. We are also partnering with Brazil in launching an anti-racism curriculum project at UNESCO.

Finally, as we commemorate the victims of slavery and remember the slave trade, we must note our ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery. Through the work of the United States President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, we are building a whole-of-Government approach that will raise public awareness about existing protections and improve the way that we protect trafficking victims and prosecute human trafficking cases within our borders.

The United States will continue to work in the United Nations and in other international forums to end modern slavery, to bring traffickers to justice and to empower survivors to reclaim their rightful freedom.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Jamaica, who will speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica): I have the distinct honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We are deeply honoured to once again participate in this solemn commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to remember and honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

CARICOM delegations wish to be associated with the statements made earlier by the Deputy Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, on behalf of the African Group, and by the representative of the Bahamas, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

This year we commemorate this event under the theme "The transatlantic slave trade: the living legacy of 30 million untold stories". The theme begs for poignant reflection on a vast reservoir of silenced voices of a people whose expressions were muted or suppressed over generations under a brutal system of trading in persons from Africa and of African descent.

There are those who say that slavery is an issue of the past and that we do not need to rehash a debate on the topic. We do not support that idea, indeed we reject it, since the legacies of that pernicious system linger on in many parts of the world today — a legacy of hatred, prejudice and racial discrimination. The proponents of such a viewpoint would wish to silence the debate on slavery, but we feel that the stories need to be told because the lessons from our past inform the present, and will most certainly influence the future. On that basis, we seek to counter the legacy of slavery by inculcating new values and attitudes in the children and young people of today's generation and for future generations to come.

As we commemorate this solemn remembrance of slavery, we take time to remember the struggles of our ancestors and the freedom that they secured, quite often through blood, sweat and tears. We recognize that it is a freedom that comes with responsibility, that is never to be taken lightly and that is to be protected at all costs.

All CARICOM countries are former slave societies, which today are proud democracies, built on a culture of freedom and born out of the struggle for emancipation, liberation and self-determination. The countries of the CARICOM subregion were colonized by almost every former colonial Power involved in the slave trade. We share a common history of the hardship suffered under slavery and of triumph over the architects of that system. We are proud of the history of the Caribbean and cherish it dearly. We represent the region that spawned the first country to shed the

vestiges of the system of slavery. Here, I refer to Haiti. It is well known that the first society to abolish the enslavement of African peoples emerged from a revolution in Haiti. That was a turning point in world history.

It took some 100 years after the Haitian revolution, but successive CARICOM member States eventually fought for and secured the emancipation of our peoples from the terrible system of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Having escaped the brutal system of slavery, we attach great importance to our struggle for nationhood and the subsequent acquisition of emancipation and independence. That, in turn, granted our respective countries the sovereignty and sovereign rights that enable us to effectively participate in the United Nations on an equal footing with all other Member States of the international community.

As we celebrate the 2011 International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we pay tribute to our African ancestors. We remember the millions whose lives were lost in bondage on the journey through the middle passage and those who suffered and died under the brutal system of slavery in Europe and the Americas, including our own subregion of the Caribbean. We pay tribute to their strength of character and their resilience. We celebrate the things they have left behind — their customs, their food, their music and their religious beliefs.

More important, we encourage their muted voices to be released as we insist that the 30 million untold stories be heard. The once silenced voices, when truly liberated, will serve to inform, educate, raise awareness and stir consciences wherever possible. Against this background, we salute those who have engaged in research, education and advocacy on the issue of slavery, many of whom addressed the General Assembly during the course of this week in the various activities organized in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Public Information.

As we all know, the International Day of Remembrance is but one facet of our collective commitment to addressing the issue of slavery at the multilateral level. The decision to erect a Permanent Memorial at United Nations Headquarters, in keeping with the mandate of the 2001 Durban Declaration and in tandem with today's remembrance, is another facet, and together they represent two sides of the same coin. May I also take this opportunity to thank all those delegations that spoke and at least made reference to the Permanent Memorial initiative.

I am delighted to report that with the assistance and support of States members of the African Group and other partners, our efforts to implement this tangible outcome has made real progress to date. During the course of this year, we have made advances in negotiations with UNESCO for the international design competition, held an inaugural consultative meeting of donors, launched a website to raise international awareness, and secured more than $900,000, which is being held in the Trust Fund established to implement the initiative. Here, on behalf of the CARICOM member States, I would pay tribute to all donor countries that have seen fit to make a contribution to this worthy cause.

I encourage my colleagues to visit the website at www.unslaverymemorial.org. It is a work in progress that we plan to update in due course.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

On behalf of the States members of CARICOM, I also wish to express appreciation for the kind generosity of those countries that have already made donations to the Permanent Memorial Trust Fund. We are thankful for the show of solidarity in acknowledging the legacy of this dark period of history. We envisage that other countries will follow in their footsteps in making contributions to the Permanent Memorial Trust Fund to enable us to reach our target of $4.5 million for implementation.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the sentiments expressed by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Let the living legacies of the 30 million untold stories be heard and let them be told through the erection of a Permanent Memorial at United Nations Headquarters to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now have the honour of giving the floor to Ms. Ruth Simmons, President of Brown University.

Ms. Simmons: I wish to thank the States members of the Caribbean Community and the Group of African States for their invitation to speak to the

Assembly today in solemn remembrance of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade.

This International Day of Remembrance is an important international breakthrough in a long effort to recognize the seriousness and consequences of a monumental violation of human rights. The work that the Assembly has undertaken to recognize victims of the slave trade augurs well for future efforts to acknowledge the magnitude of this immense tragedy. I thank the Assembly for recognizing that nations cannot fully embrace the principles of fairness, equality and shared governance without acknowledging the occurrence of heinous acts that have violated these principles. Such a failure vitiates the most worthy current intentions. A full account of the slave trade, accompanied by an open acknowledgement of the ways in which nations' wealth rests upon this trade, is essential in the all-important struggle for openness, equality, mutual respect and peace among nations.

The work of UNESCO and the leadership of the United Nations in identifying those elements of human history that are important to how a culture interacts with other cultures are invaluable. Most recently, the incoming Director-General of UNESCO spoke in her inaugural address about a new humanism — one that evokes the fundamental rights of a people to their language, their history and their culture. This, as a general principle of international law and diplomacy, reveals in powerful ways the damage done by the transatlantic slave trade, in which, in the interest of commerce, nations permitted the systematic destruction of the connection of human beings not only to their lands and their families but also to their histories, their languages, their religious practices and their souls.

This wilful erasure has had far-reaching consequences down through the ages. Cast once more at sea, inheritors of this erasure have been left to a patchwork existence with gaping holes that cannot for the most part ever be filled with pieces that precisely match. Other peoples around the world have known such loss and have struggled with similarly deliberate oppressive acts, but nowhere has the erasure been more extensive or more complete than in the transatlantic trade.

What is one to do in the face of such a massive violation of human rights? Courageous individuals throughout the world must produce the arguments, challenge the practices that keep evil in place and ultimately overturn such wrongs. While acknowledging how difficult it can be to resist an evil act that has taken deep and self-interested root, I believe that resisting human rights violations must be an important, if not dominant feature, of worldwide efforts for peace and security.

The self-interest that inspires widespread evil deeds is powerful indeed. It overwhelms common sense and common decency, trounces good will towards others and installs itself with virulence. Even more problematic is the fact that, as virulent as such acts may have become, once they are eradicated the world forgets all too easily how they come into being and gain traction. This cycle of forgetting must finally be broken.

Our task in these times is to ensure that the world does not forget how easily massive human rights violations take root and gain acceptance in the heart of a society. International vigilance is required to identify and address the rise of such offences. International focus, diplomatic efforts and timely action to arrest the growth of such violations are essential.

Universities are vital partners in this process. Our task in serving society is not only to record history accurately but also to make sure that the history of such transgressions is not erased. I said that it is all too easy for such offences to settle upon the consciousness of a society. Sadly, it is just as easy for history to be erased or written in such a way as to make light of offences or, in some cases, to deny that they ever occurred. Deniers of atrocities are a breed apart. Inheritors of the malevolence of the original sin, they perpetuate the injustice done to victims by denying that it ever occurred in the first place.

We must face the deniers and, putting evidence before them, counter their fabrications with the stark truth. This universities do steadfastly. But universities must also reveal the truth of their own histories, practices and erasures. Many of our oldest universities in the United States have a special burden vis-à-vis the history of slavery. Our campuses were often founded with the largesse of those directly involved in the slave trade, and, in some cases, founders, faculty and even students kept slaves. This secret has long lingered in the shadows of the academy — an academy that today extols the principles of freedom and equality.

My university — Brown University — took steps to recover this history as a way of demonstrating that

the fear of the truth has no place in a university that purports to expose the truth. In 2003, a committee of faculty and students undertook a process to uncover any ties that our university had to the slave trade.

In commissioning a study of our university's history, I said that it was an effort to involve the campus community in a discovery of the meaning of our past. Understanding our history and suggesting how the full truth of that history could be incorporated into our common traditions would not be easy, but then, it did not have to be.

Our three-year-long process resulted in an extraordinary expedition through archives and artefacts of the New England slave trade. We learned that, although that history was largely absent from the university's official documents, some of our founders were in fact involved directly or indirectly in the transatlantic slave trade. We also learned that our state of Rhode Island was "steeped in the guilt and infamy of the African slave trade". Our process explored the meaning and implication of the benefit the university received from this commerce. We asked, I think, important questions: what did this history teach us about what we do today, and what does it compel us to do in these times? We concluded that we should memorialize this history so that it is forever after a visible dimension of our early history and current identity.

We are doing that by rewriting our history with the full account of what transpired in those early days. We are also committed to helping others understand the past and present consequences of human trafficking in all its dimensions; a centre is being established on our campus for this purpose. In addition, a memorial is being commissioned on our campus that acknowledges this history.

Finally, we decided that we should do more for the children of our city, particularly those who might be heirs to this history. In that regard, we established a fund to support local schools and a programme to train teachers who are employed in the public schools. These small steps are by no means intended to make amends for this history. Instead, they are meant to be ever-present lessons in how the principles of equality and justice can be so easily tarnished. They are to be constant reminders of our obligations to be "drum majors for justice", as Martin Luther King, Jr., intended.

Egregious wrongs compel action. The most important action is that which addresses the offence, cleanses the record and brings to light the truth of what has transpired. Most of all, any action that heals must cast light on the lasting effects of human rights violations. The action taken today is part of an important process to acknowledge that too little attention has been paid to the tragic commerce and consequence of the trade in African slaves. It is my hope that this worldwide process will lead to a greater understanding of those lasting consequences and prompt the world to consider ways in which to prevent modern-day abuses of human rights. We at Brown University are proud to have launched our process, inspiring other universities to follow; and we are proud today to be partners in the effort to set the record straight and to honour the sacrifice of so many millions who perished in the transatlantic trade.

Again, I thank the Assembly for the work that it has undertaken to acknowledge this history, and I am honoured to stand here today in solemn remembrance of those who perished in the transatlantic slave trade. I speak, too, in honour of my own forebears, who, in spite of inhuman conditions, survived and made a life in an alien land. It is to all of them that we owe remembrance this day.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Simmons for her statement.

I wish to inform the Assembly that the Cameroon Cultural Group is here with us today. I invite you all to enjoy their presentation.

The members of the General Assembly watched a dance performance.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of all participants, I would like to thank the Cameroon Cultural Group most sincerely for its fine performance.

Her Excellency Ms. Ama Tutu Muna, Minister of Culture of Cameroon, will now present a gift to the United Nations. Deputy Secretary-General Migiro has the honour and pleasure of accepting this gift on behalf of the Organization.

Ms. Muna (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on the way in which he is conducting this commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave

trade. As at the previous commemoration, Cameroon feels honoured to participate in this event.

On this occasion, I would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his efforts and commitment to the success of the events that, throughout this week, have sought to commemorate the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Under this year's theme "The living legacy of 30 million untold stories", we have had occasion to think about and reflect on relevant topics, including, for example, the right to the truth and education about the horrors to which victims of slavery were subjected for decades. The theme has certainly helped to guide our thoughts on the reasons for, the consequences of and the lessons learned from that painful past and to raise the world's awareness of the dangers of slavery and associated phenomena, such as the trafficking in persons, which is modern-day slavery, racism and prejudices of all kinds.

For its part, Cameroon was honoured to participate in this week of activities devoted to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. As part of the festivities marking the celebration of this event, Cameroon, for its part, is honoured to present a token to the United Nations. Therefore, at the instruction of His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, I have the honour to offer this drum, which Cameroon presents to the United Nations on this solemn day.

The drum has the following characteristics. In terms of materials, it is sculpted from a precious wood from Cameroon known as padou or camwood, a redwood typical of tropical forests. The roping is made of rattan, a woody vine found in the forests of Cameroon; it is used to stretch and hold in place the skin covering the striking surface of the drum. The skin was taken from the back of a zebu, as it is quite elastic and solid and produces an excellent tone. The drum is 1.5 metres high, 55 centimetres in diameter and weighs a total of 71 kilograms.

The outside of the drum is decorated with three central panels that should be read from right to left. The first panel depicts the sale of slaves, together with the main parties involved in the transaction. The second recounts the transportation of slaves and their trials and tribulations. Finally, the third panel illustrates the lot of slaves, mainly through depictions of labour, abuse and punishment, revolt and freedom, and the return to their roots.

The body of the drum is supported by three sturdy carriers in broken chains, which symbolize freedom. The number of carriers corresponds to the life-cycle triptych of birth, life and death; the high, medium and low tones of the drum; and the three phonetic pronunciations of the vowel "e" spoken by the peoples of the forest, which, when sung together, make up the original jazz chorus. Ultimately, we find ourselves in the singularity and universality of the number "three". Thus, in a few words, I have described this drum, which is laden with symbols.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to thank the authorities of Cameroon for having so kindly enriched the beautiful collection of artistic and cultural works of our common house. I would also like to thank Ms. Muna for her important statement.

The General Assembly has thus concluded its commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 116?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.